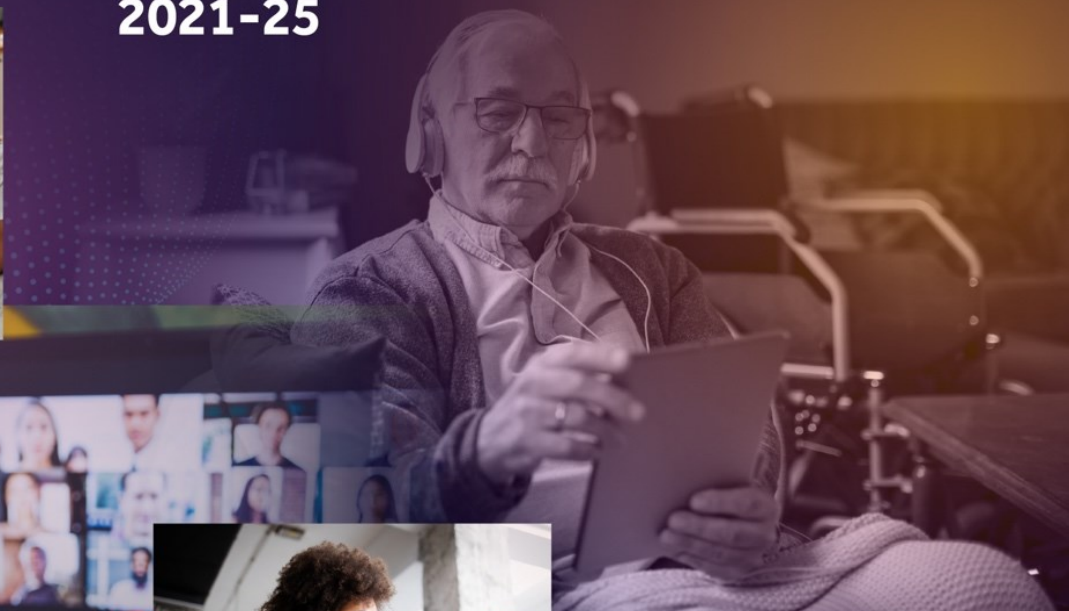


Cheshire West & Chester Council

Towards a **digital** borough

2021-25



Cheshire West
and Chester

1. Foreword

The Council has made great strides in the use of digital technology to make our services and places more successful. Strong foundations are now in place, but this strategy takes us to the next level. It is based on local learning, best practice, the insight of a range of key stakeholders and is inextricably linked to our council plan.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the deployment of digital across society, communities and public services. We have learned that digital takes root when we build it into our thinking from the outset, not as an added extra. This was a necessity during the pandemic. In space of weeks we saw 70% of staff working from home, new engagement platforms launched, 34,000 transactions processed through intelligent webforms, a step change in the way we communicate and the proportion of customers interacting with us via digital tools increasing from 48% to 61%. But this approach now needs to be mainstreamed into all our thinking.

Digital presents massive opportunities across all our agendas. It can help drive our economy, make our care services more responsive, improve the customer experience, empower communities, make us a more efficient organisation and also support a fairer society. The case for change is compelling. But these benefits won't be delivered just by adopting the latest technology. It will only deliver its promise if we make it a core feature of how the council is designed and the wider borough operates.

We also need to ensure everyone benefits from this agenda. We can't afford to create new inequalities as we forge ahead with digital transformation. Equally we are at risk of excluding our residents and businesses who are more digitally enabled if we don't make further progress. It is staggering that 88% of UK adults have access to a smartphone, and 95% of these smartphones are used every day. Nevertheless, a comprehensive programme of digital inclusion sits alongside this plan, to support the 7% of the borough that are currently digitally excluded.

This is plan for the Borough as much as the council. Collaborative working with our partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors will be a key ingredient of our success.

While I applaud this plan, culture eats strategy for breakfast. We need to shift to a digital mindset across the council and wider borough. We would agree that digital is something you are, not something you do. It's about how you think, how you behave, what you value, and what drives decisions in your organisation.

I look forward to us all adopting this mindset and making Cheshire West a truly digital Borough.



Louise Gittins

Leader of Cheshire West and Chester Council

2. Purpose

The following document sets out how the Borough can respond to the challenges of the future and secure better outcomes for residents, communities, businesses and staff by redesigning the way local services and places work through the use of digital technology.

The strategy is deliberately and predominantly outward focused - with emphasis on how digital transformation can support customers, empower communities, and optimise care for the most vulnerable. It also provides some background on how the Council and its partners needs to organise its approach to technology to achieve those goals.

As well as articulating the Council's ambition, the document is intended to provide a framework for planning and future investment decisions. It is not an exhaustive plan but does set the scene and future direction through to 2025. It will be refreshed when needed to ensure it remains up to date with latest technology developments and local circumstances

In brief, it advocates a vision of technology being deployed appropriately to ensure Council services are more responsive, accessible, integrated, efficient, and insight driven alongside communities that are more independent, resilient and plugged into economic growth opportunities.

3. Vision

By 2025 technology underpins public services, communities and the local economy leading to better outcomes for local residents and businesses. The Borough will have secured fundamental improvements across the following areas:



Communities

All communities across the Borough, whatever their circumstances, have the confidence, support and access to digital technology, to drive a fairer and more equitable society



Customer

Residents have an excellent customer experience through intuitive processes and technology



Commerce

Businesses can do business with the council through intuitive processes and technology and are supported to thrive in an increasingly digital economy



Connectivity

The whole borough benefits from excellent digital infrastructure



Co-production

Digital technology supports local people to work alongside the council to solve local problems and shape local decisions



Care

Residents requiring care and support achieve the maximum independence and a better quality of life through digital technology



Capabilities

The council as an organisation has the right capabilities to deliver the strategy and operate more effectively

4. How the strategy was developed

To inform the development of this strategy a number of key activities have taken place:

- **Alignment with the Council Plan:** This strategy is fully aligned to the future direction of the organisation. It is a key enabler to the Council Plan and our approach to recovery & renewal following the COVID pandemic. Each priority within the council plan and recovery and renewal plan has been assessed to ensure that digital can enable the council to achieve its objectives further and faster. It will prove critical to agendas such as tackling the climate emergency, responding to a poverty emergency, driving a successful and inclusive economy, supporting children to have the best start in life, supporting healthier and happier adults, improving local neighbourhoods and being a more efficient and empowering organisation.
- **Engagement with key stakeholders:** The key actions in the strategy have been informed by the views of residents, businesses, partners and elected Members. Resident feedback is constantly sought on the digital experience they have with the council and a customer survey also took place in 2019 to gain further insight. Engagement with residents and community organisations has also taken place to inform key actions to tackle digital inclusion. Partners such as local NHS organisations, the Government Digital Service and the Local Enterprise Partnership have also assisted in shaping the strategy. Elected Members have been involved through a cross party ICT group and many recommendations from the Pandemic Scrutiny Committee have been incorporated into this plan.
- **Engagement with services:** Through many fora, Council services have been helping shape this strategy. Directors and senior manager have been fully engaged and detailed work with frontline staff will be a critical next step.
- **Understanding our starting point:** To understand where we are now starting from on this journey, we have carried out an extensive review of the existing digital maturity of the Council and the Borough.
- **Consideration of best practice:** The council has participated in a number of networks through the Local Government Association and Government Digital Service to identify best practice across public bodies and also private sector organisations.

5. Digital Transformation Design Principles

While the world of technology moves quickly, these 10 guiding principles will remain consistent through the life of this strategy to help us achieve our goals.

A whole council, whole Borough approach	To achieve the maximum impact, the strategy cuts across all services and activities across the Borough. Digital solutions will be designed in this way to ensure silos are broken down within council services, between organisations and across communities.
Digital by Design	If a process or service can be digitised, and delivers against our strategic priorities, it should be taken forward. This should be done by reimagining how a service can work rather than automating existing traditional processes. Each change should aim for the highest proportion of people to move from traditional to digital channels. Bearing in mind our resident demographics, we should be careful that digitisation does not create exclusion.
Redesign via Customer Insight	Using evidence of our customers' needs, service use and customer journeys, we will establish the current gaps in service provision and opportunities for improvement. Services will be designed around delivering what the customer needs when they need it. Shifting services away from office hours, face-to-face contact and telephone-based services toward automation will allow customers to use our services 24/7. Through rapid feedback and meaningful insight, services and communications must be targeted to provide customers with the right content at the right time.
Digitally included	Through a coordinated partnership approach support and training will be put in place for those that want and need to use and access digital services. Non-digital services will always be available for those that need them.
Security and protection	Solutions will be designed to be robust against external threats and data protection will be designed into future approaches.
Digital Investment	Our application of digital must be pragmatic with decisions based on businesses cases and clear benefits to the customer and the councils. Digital change requires investment. The cost benefit analysis must reflect the fact that investment can save the council money and / or improve the customer experience. The council has a full understanding of its total expenditure on digital, data and technology and the return on this investment, and will continue to seek maximum value for money.
Learning by doing	We will adopt an agile approach to implementation of this strategy. This means we will adopt new processes and technology in an iterative way and learn from the benefits before we scale up. We won't be afraid to experiment and fail, delete things that don't work, learn from them and try new approaches. There is no off the shelf manual for digital transformation and solutions need to reflect local learning and innovation.
Best practice	We will learn from and drive national best practice. Follow our Commitment to the Local Digital Declaration (localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/) we will play our part in 'fixing the national plumbing' across the public sector, using the 'Technology Code of Practice' when we implement our systems. Our aim is to work as openly as we can on all of our projects. This means we will communicate about our work and what we are learning, and we share our ideas widely to get feedback and suggestions.
A Digital Mindset	Culturally, our organisations must embrace Digital as the standard way of working. Staff should think digital-first and have the confidence to self-serve, self-fix and come forward with ideas for digital innovation.
A strong platform	the council will ensure that it has the right ICT and change management delivery model, the right infrastructure, and the right tools to deliver this strategy.

6. Communities

The challenge and the opportunity

Inclusivity should form a vital component of any digital strategy;

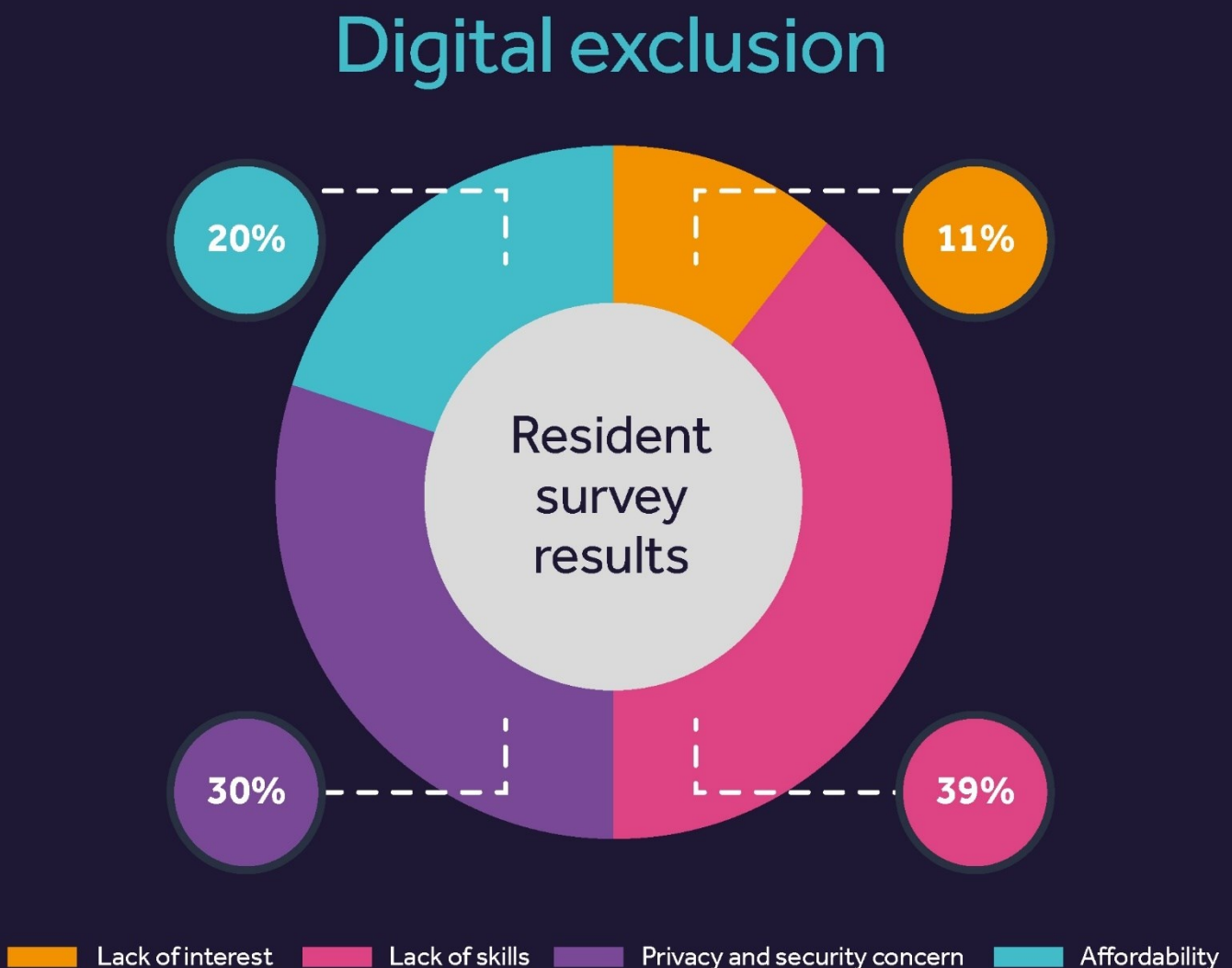
“across the UK its estimated that 11.3 million people don’t have the basic digital skills they need to thrive in today’s world. How much are they missing out on?” - Good things Foundation

Like many boroughs, we have pockets of digital exclusion which is adversely affecting our younger people experiencing poverty and amongst our older residents. Through a combination of data sources, we believe there are at least 25,000 residents at risk of digital exclusion in Cheshire West and Chester.

Two thirds of this group are within the older population and most are from less affluent backgrounds, the remaining third are younger people and families, from more deprived areas.

The Coronavirus Pandemic has thrown into stark relief the harmful effects of digital exclusion. As more services move online, it has become increasingly difficult for our residents to get by without access to the internet. Without intervention, the digital divide will continue to widen.

Digital exclusion is not a binary issue. There are varying degrees and diverse causes of exclusion impacting the opportunities available to our residents. In Cheshire West, the most significant barriers to digital inclusion outlined in our 2019 Residents Survey were:



The borough is extremely fortunate to have a wealth of community and voluntary organisations which are committed to bridging the digital divide. There are already several community initiatives running within Cheshire West and Chester, supporting people to get online. These initiatives and organisations have, for the first time, been brought together into one partnership group. The Cheshire West Digital Inclusion Partnership group is made up of 25 partners and is leading the way in shaping our plans for digital inclusion. It is hoped that, by working together and combining resources and ideas we can make a bigger difference.

Success factors

We will be successful if we see:

- In excess of 2000 digital skills learning opportunities being provided across the borough per annum.
- Growing awareness of digital exclusion among council staff and commissioned services
- Active engagement of partners within the digital inclusion partnership group
- Consistent essential digital skills training across the borough
- An increase in the quantity of available digital champions
- Our frontline staff (including commissioned services) can identify digital exclusion and support residents to get online.
- Our residents feel they have the opportunity to access digital training and are able to access the internet at an affordable cost within every community

A vision for the future



Christine isn't really interested in the internet. She sees her family and friends using it but she doesn't think it's really for her and besides she thinks it looks expensive. Her housing officer lets her know about a new scheme supported by the council to get online. She attends a course with her friends where she is shown how to get online and how to use the internet for things like paying bills, finding out what's going on in her neighbourhood, online shopping, connecting with family and getting the best deals on her utilities and insurance. She's more confident now, feels better connected and a local organisation is supporting her to get online at home.

Making it real

To achieve this, the following fundamental changes will be taken forward:

1. Digital Inclusion Partnership

We will continue to work with our partners to put in place and grow a Digital Inclusion Partnership Group, that will help to shape and focus the efforts of all partners to those that are currently excluded from digital.

Currently the partnership has 25 active organisations and we want to continue to grow it and learn from digitally excluded communities through engaging directly and ensuring representation on the partnership group.

2. Digital skills learning platform	Through the Partnership we will put in place a consistent digital skill offer across the borough. This is to help all residents receive the digital skills they need to thrive by any partner that is helping them.
3. Digital champions volunteer network	<p>We will work with our existing volunteer networks to expand the reach of digital inclusion initiatives and explore how the council and partners can also utilise their staff and community champions to increase digital volunteer capacity in the borough.</p> <p>The partnership Group will facilitate the opportunity for existing volunteers to improve their digital skills, learn to identify digital exclusion among residents, and understand how to support excluded residents in their digital inclusion journey.</p>
4. Digital inclusion referral pathways	To ensure all digitally excluded individuals in our borough are given the chance to get online, we will put in place simple referral pathways across the partnership, our schools, frontline council staff and volunteers of digital exclusion, providing them with the tools to signpost residents to gain the help suited to their needs.
5. Devices and connectivity **	To tackle the challenge of the affordability of digital devices and connectivity, the partnership will explore means of providing access to the internet at an affordable cost within every community. Schemes such as lending libraries and building on laptops for school children will be explored.
6. Commercial sector engagement	We will engage and link up with our commercial partners and large organisations within the borough so that they too can be help with this challenge.
7. Communication and engagement	<p>To attract new volunteers and new partner organisations, and to improve the consistency of the digital inclusion offer across the borough, the Council will facilitate a web presence for Digital Inclusion which will include information and resources about how to get involved, or how to set up new networks / initiatives.</p> <p>To support the website and guide its design, a Cheshire West Digital Inclusion Partnership brand will be established. This branding will be duplicated on any promotional material and should assist in building awareness of the project.</p>
8. Digital exclusion data	The council will continue to improve its understanding of digital exclusion across the borough. New means of understanding digital exclusion will be explored in order to comprehend who is digitally excluded and what barriers exist to people getting online.

**** denotes that this scheme is not fully funded and may be subject to securing external funding through government, partner agencies or through prioritisation on existing budgets.**

7. Customers

The challenge and the opportunity:

Our residents rightly expect to engage with the council in the way they would interact with other service organisations. Over 90% of residents use the internet on a regular basis in their everyday lives. Convenience, being able to track service requests, an intuitive experience across all digital channels are all features that residents expect. The goal should be to make the experience as positive as possible so more traditional channels such as telephony, letter and face to face are less important although available if required.

In 2018 we launched a programme of digital transformation. The programme worked with 17 key services areas the Council which still received significant telephone and face to face contact or were particularly complex and where customers would benefit from digital services.

To help shape this programme a significant amount of engagement took place throughout the programme with over 100 service users, carers and frontline staff from Children in Care, Foster Carers, SEN service users, Mental Health Day Services, Carers Forum, Adult Social Care Providers and Partners and with 7,500 Residents who had recently contacted the Council.

The programme implemented over 100 new digital processes, a new Council App, our Live Well portal for community help, An artificial intelligence chat bot 'Aida' which now manages in excess of 35,000 queries each year and growing and many more changes to help services reach our residents.

Listening and understanding of our residents and service users' needs helped is to put in place meaningful digital change that helped the Council to achieve savings, but more importantly, customers have told us that they like the developments. It was also particularly important during the covid-19 pandemic as customers had fewer options to communicate with council services other than through digital channels. Over the last 3 years, the proportion of customer contact through digital mechanisms has now increased by nearly 30% and we have seen improvements in Customer Satisfaction.

However, there is more that needs to be done. Our digital journey has not always put in place council-wide solutions and has sometimes implemented tactical changes. This means that they have been developed individually rather than looking at them from a whole-customer and whole-council perspective. For example, we don't have a standard approach to common tasks like taking payments or verifying a resident's identity or to managing citizen data. The result is that we don't always offer the quality of experience that customers are used to from other sectors – such as remembering their details from previous transactions or emailing them back to let them know when we have completed a job.

The Council will therefore reinforce the principle of 'Experience First' across all digital services ensuring that our Customers have the best possible digital experience and chose to use digital first in the future. We need to focus on designing digital processes and solutions with a strong emphasis on user experience and ease of use – in the same way the Government Digital Service (GDS) has done for some central government processes, including renewing a passport or taxing a car. Services will be tailored to the needs of the user with self service options that are simple

to use with the ability to track service requests and full integration of the website with back office processes. Data will be collected once, only when we need it, and shared when required across our services to increase process efficiency for the customer. Information Advice and Guidance for residents will be joined up across partner agencies. Rich insight about customers enables this digital experience to be tailored to the needs of users. A comprehensive digital inclusion plan will be in place to ensure more vulnerable service users can take advantage of these opportunities and digital assistance will be provided to ensure that customers can access services for themselves in face to face locations.

We will be successful if we see:

- 15% to 20% growth in customer transactions with the council being made through digital channels
- An increasing proportion of customers registering for a customer account
- Our overall cost per serve reducing
- Faster delivery of digital solutions by adopting an agile approach
- More services available online
- Improved customer satisfaction with the digital experience

A vision for the future



Laura hasn't previously used the internet when dealing with the council. That's not really what councils do and she is more likely to ring them or go to a council building when there is an issue. She does use the internet a lot at home for shopping, holidays and keeping up with local news. But recently Laura has heard about the council making it easier for customers to get what they need online. She has signed up to a new residents portal. This brings together all her dealings with the council in one place. She doesn't have to fill out long forms as the portal remembers her details and she can track where things are up to for things like his council tax bill and missed bin collections. She can make contact with the council 24/7 and finds the internet much easier to navigate, supported by an easy to follow layout, a clear search function and online chat. She also has fed back some ideas for improvement to the layout of the internet and the council is working on these suggestions. She's also signed up to an e-newsletter and the councils social media an knows exactly what's going on his local area

Making it real

To achieve this, we will deliver the following fundamental changes will be taken forward:

1. Customer Experience Network & Programme	To help shape and inform digital and our service designs, we will create a customer experience network to inform and shape improvements that are needed to support how our customers interact with Council services. Mystery shopping will be reinvigorated along with an internal culture change programme and new customer charter. Customer feedback on our digital channels will be used to drive continuous improvement.
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2. Redesigned Website	<p>The Council's digital front door will be renewed through a complete redesign around our customer's needs. The website will be designed for simplicity, accessibility and mobile first as we know from our customers these are important to them. The site will focus on quick and straight forward service fulfilment whether it is to perform a transaction or to find information. We will continue to develop future proofing capabilities such as AI Chat facilities to further support visitors to the site along with personalisation to make our site more tuned into customer's needs & allow subscriptions to preferred content. We will ensure the site is developed with voice services in mind for accessibility purposes and explore opportunities to connect with voice services such as Alexa and Google home.</p> <p>Progress for this is well underway with many of the technical features and designs in testing.</p>
3. Customer Portal	<p>Our existing customer account will be enhanced to act as a chosen single place for customers to transact with the Council for nearly all services. This will act as a cornerstone for our new digital approach. We will also explore how our customers can use this portal to manage their data and shape how we use their information to deliver services to them in the future. The benefits for customers will be all their transactions in one place, the ability to track progress, and the auto-population of online forms.</p>
4. Integration of Systems	<p>The council makes use of many systems that underpin how we operate and deliver services to our residents. We will integrate our core systems to deliver a deeper and end to end service for all our customers. This will mean customers will be able to transact with us across even more services whenever and wherever suits them.</p>
5. Common Process	<p>To create simple and seamless services for our customers we need to have wherever possible standardised approaches and tools for how a customer's journey is fulfilled. We will look to standardise on common processes that underpin Applying for a service; booking an appointment; Paying; Reporting and requesting services. This will help our residents through simple and consistent experiences regardless of the service or channel they choose.</p>
6. Integrated Customer Experience	<p>To achieve a consistent and seamless service for customers we will integrate process into a single customer services approach for any customer contact that still remains within the Council. This will drive a consistent quality experience for our customers, reduce hand offs and ultimately mean that the right answers are given to our customers the first time they contact us.</p> <p>We will redesign the current face to face experience for customers. There will be a service available for those that need it but we will look to enhance this experience to have better access to technology in face to face locations to assist customers alongside speaking to individuals.</p>
7. Digital Tools Review	<p>To help make sure we have the right tools available to meet our ambitious digital future, we will review our key tools that underpin how we provide great customer services, ensuring that they support the Council to move forward on its digital journey. In addition to the Website we will review our current telephony and customer relationship platform.</p>

8. Mobile App

Building on the existing Council App approach we will increase the services delivered through this, giving customers access to even more services on the go. We will work with services to ensure processes are tuned to provide updates to mobile app users on the go.

8. Commerce

The challenge and the opportunity:

The borough has clear ambitions to grow the economy, improve business and employment opportunities for local people and to promote the area as place to invest and grow in. By working with key partners in the public and private sector we aim to offer an easily accessible and approachable service to support sustainable economic growth. Digital has a key part to play in helping to achieve this.

Our businesses expect a seamless and convenient digital experience when interacting with the council. Businesses may have numerous interactions with the council on issues such as planning, regulation, business support and business rates. Often these transactions are hosted on separate portals and separate websites, leading to a disjointed experience from existing and new businesses.

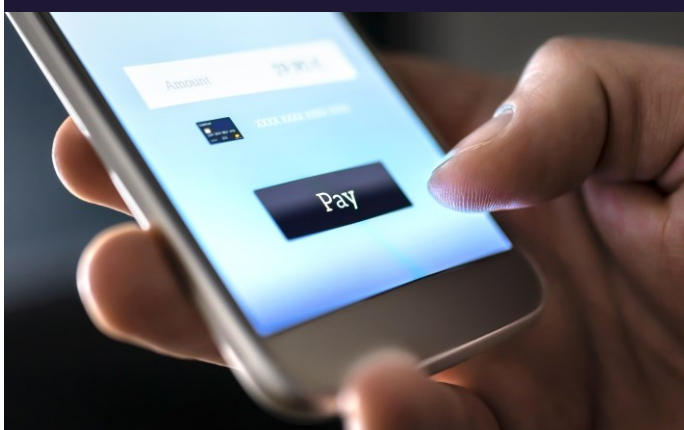
The 2018 Tech Nation report estimated the value of the UK's Digital Tech economy to be nearly **£185 billion**, growing at a rate nearly **3 times faster** than the rest of the UK economy, with strong prospects envisaged. The council can also assist with supporting young people and existing employees with digital skills. The economic future of the Borough goes hand in hand with our digital ambition.

There is also more that could be done for the council to provide better digital platforms for businesses to trade successfully in an increasingly digital economy. This was a key aspect of the High Street, towns and city centre commission.

We will be successful if we see:

- A thriving high street with an increase in footfall
- A greater proportion of younger people choosing digital skill pathways and careers
- A greater number of businesses taking advantage of digital skills programmes
- An increased proportion of business-related transactions completed through digital channels
- A thriving digital business sector including startups, small to medium sized enterprises and larger companies locating and expanding in the borough
- An increase of inward investment and growth

A vision for the future



Sandra runs a retail business. Times have been very tough for the local high street for some time and covid hasn't helped. Big plans for regeneration are on the way but they will take some time to come to fruition. The council has also offered to work with Sandra and her business to help them with their digital skills, so they are fit for the future. She feels confident launching new her business on the new business app and puts in place a loyalty reward scheme through her app. New digital screens are being installed which promote the local area and local traders, more convenient cashless parking is on the way and free wifi is available for visitors and shoppers.

Making it real

To achieve this, we will deliver the following fundamental changes:

1. Business portal

We will put in place a single portal where all businesses can go to for support to start up and grow. Focussed around their needs the portal will be a one stop shop for advice, guidance, connecting with other business sectors, accessing Council business services and keeping informed.

The portal will also be outward facing, helping us to effectively promote and position the borough as a place to invest, live, work and visit. Attract new inward investment and job creation opportunities.

We will consolidate the multiple business sites across the Council and work with our partners to make our businesses digital journey straight forward to support them to be sustainable and grow.

2. Business app

We will support the introduction of a focussed business mobile app that enables local businesses raise their profile digitally, offer loyalty rewards, competitions and events. To help business to raise awareness with consumers, and access support to improve their digital skills to encourage footfall and sales, aiding a quick and more sustainable economic recovery. This is particularly important for smaller traders on the High Street and to encourage residents to buy local.

3. High street public wifi **

We will explore the benefits of public Wi-Fi in the High Street, this will start initially in Chester City Centre. We will understand the benefits to our visitors, businesses and the council and how this could form a foundation for smart places and improved data to form a case to expand this initiative.

4. Supporting digital advertising	<p>We will introduce greater use of digital advertising screens across the borough, utilising council-owned assets, to support local commerce and communications.</p> <p>Phase 1 of this is already underway with sites in Chester, Northwich, Ellesmere port and Winsford already identified.</p>
5. Digital Car Parking Payments **	<p>As part of the Council's Car Parking Strategy, council car parks will move to cashless payments providing a modern and convenient experience for visitors and shoppers.</p>
6. Digital Education & Careers	<p>We will continue to support our schools directly and through forums such as the Education Improvement Partnership with their digital needs;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping to develop future digital teaching partnerships with nationally recognised organisations such as codenation & google garage as well as local coding clubs. • helping them to support young people into digital career pathways. through apprenticeships, T Levels and other further education pathways working in Partnership with the Cheshire and Warrington Pledge. • continuing to support with the challenges of remote learning both in terms of delivery and devices that are essential for access for many children. <p>We will also work with DWP, training providers and other stakeholders to help adults develop their digital skills through our commitment to lifelong learning and an inclusive economy.</p>
7. Digital skills	<p>We will continue to work at a partnership level across the sub region to support and shape access to essential digital skills. Through the work of the Cheshire and Warrington Digital Skills Partnership and Growth Hub we will continue to seek funding to grow initiatives such as the Journey First providing intensive support for young people and the Accelerate programme providing employees with access to digital skills.</p>

**** denotes that this scheme is not fully funded and may be subject to securing external funding through government, partner agencies or through prioritisation on existing budgets.**

9. Connectivity

The challenge and opportunity

Reliable and fast internet connectivity is vital for a high performing inclusive economy optimising public services, sustainable places, economic growth and digital and economic inclusion. Following the delivery of the Connecting Cheshire programme, 94.6% of premises in the Borough now have access to Superfast broadband speeds (30Mbps or greater). Many of the areas not having access are in rural wards. In addition, just 26.8% of local premises are able to access Ultrafast broadband (300Mbps or greater) compared to the national average of 54% and 8% of premises are connected to Full Fibre infrastructure compared to the national average of 12%. While, 90% of the Borough is now covered by a 4G signal by one or more mobile networks, 5G coverage rollout is in its very early

stages. The rural nature of the Borough explains many of these trends and must be addressed in future local and national policy.

The Government has set out its ambitions to ensure world class digital connectivity that is gigabit-capable, reliable, long-lasting, and widely available across the UK – and to do so at pace. They have set an ambitious target for 15 million premises to be connected to full fibre by 2025, with nationwide coverage by 2033. They also want to be a world leader in the next generation of mobile technology, 5G, with deployment to the majority of the country by 2027 so that UK consumers and businesses can take early advantage of the benefits. This will require sustained investment in infrastructure and careful planning, particularly to cover areas that are less commercially viable.

We will be successful if we see:

- Achieve 100% superfast or ultrafast coverage for residents and businesses
- Securing investment to extend full fibre coverage, 5G, and ultrafast broadband in line with the national average
- Strengthen relationships with commercial providers and BDUK
- Greater use and adoption of smart systems and data to support service delivery
- Digital contributing to a more inclusive economy where everyone benefits from growth

A vision for the future



Thomas lives in a village in Cheshire which has never had good broadband. It's really frustrating and initiatives have come and gone which he thinks haven't helped. Thomas finds himself having to go to his friends in the next town to use the internet and working from home is a real challenge. Recently, though the council seemed to have joined forces with internet providers and the government to sort these issues out. New houses that are being built in the village are supported by good internet connections. Existing houses are also being supported to access fibre broadband. A pilot for 5G is also on its way. Thomas feels his area is now no longer back of the queue and he can see the council is doing all it can support the village to be connected. Local businesses are also very positive and can see that better internet connections will help them grow.

Making it real

To achieve this, we aim to deliver the following fundamental changes, subject to a resource and capacity review currently underway:

1. Complete phase 3 of the Connecting Cheshire Programme

We are making best use of existing programmes of connectivity, over the next 3 years in Cheshire West there will be 476 additional gigabit capable connections made which will support business and homes to access fast and reliable connectivity, we will be targeting this to help those areas in the borough that are currently underserved & isolated.

2. Establish a boroughwide infrastructure forum	<p>Through working together with strategic connectivity partners we will be able to facilitate a joined up and future focussed connectivity agenda across the borough. The establishment of an infrastructure forum with partners such as Openreach, Virgin Media, City Fibre, BDUK and others alongside key Council Services such as Highways, Planning & Growth will support a one borough approach to joining up existing programmes and help shape our future ones.</p> <p>The council will work with these providers to reduce any barriers and to help smooth delivery of the rollout. For example, the forum will facilitate the smooth implementation of the City Fibre programme introducing investment of £23m in connectivity to over 46,000 premises around Chester core.</p>
3. Enable Gigabit Capable infrastructure **	<p>We will enable Gigabit Capable infrastructure across borough through a partnership approach with the Cheshire & Warrington LEP sub-region and neighbouring areas with particular focus on delivery to priority and ‘not spot’ areas, through leveraging commercial and government investment building on programmes such as the “Outside In” programme to provide opportunities to deliver greater connectivity in less commercially viable areas.</p> <p>Working with and sharing learning with our neighbouring partners through the Mersey Dee Alliance such as the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and the Liverpool City Region who are delivering a significant connectivity programmes. Working together we will look to leverage collective experience and gain a stronger voice with government and strategic plans for the region which will help to secure government funding for connectivity.</p>
4. Aligning policies and infrastructure schemes to improving digital connectivity	<p>Policies within the Local Plan will be aligned to support digital connectivity. Digital connectivity will also be designed into future significant infrastructure schemes, regeneration programmes and highways developments.</p>
5. Using public assets to drive connectivity **	<p>The council will explore with schools and public sector partners how assets such as land, buildings and key contracts / investments can support the delivery of connectivity programmes, particularly in areas that less commercially viable.</p> <p>The council is investing in a next generation wide area network to support connectivity across local services within the public sector. This could be utilised to attract commercial connectivity providers to improve connectivity, particularly in rural areas.</p>
6. Rural Gigabit Connectivity + Programme **	<p>We will make better use of Rural Gigabit Connectivity (RGC) voucher schemes through a more coordinated and clear approach, helping our communities to join up and play their part in bringing connectivity to their areas.</p> <p>To support this further the Council will work with partners to explore how we can introduce a top or match voucher scheme to compliment the RGC schemes to bring connectivity to areas that need it most.</p>
7. Smart Specialisation **	<p>We will explore how through data and digital we can support the boroughs key priorities such as Climate Change. Understanding the benefits to our places by taking a more insight driven approach to key data and systems across the Council. The council has a vast array of digital assets such as CCTV, Smart traffic lights, Smart bins and a number of Air Pollution sensors.</p>

**** denotes that this scheme is not fully funded and will be subject to securing external funding through government, partner agencies or through prioritisation on existing budgets.**

10. Co-production

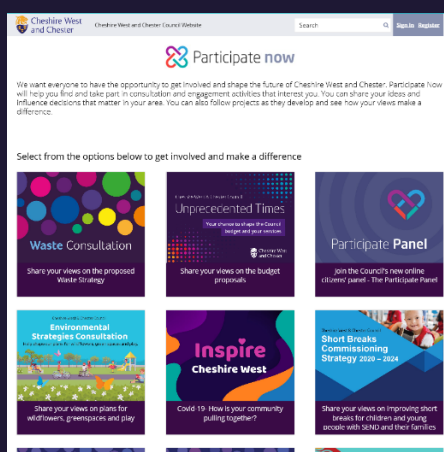
The challenge and opportunity

The Council Plan presents a vision of residents and businesses being more actively engaged in solving issues in their community, co-producing alongside the council and other partners. This ‘Play Your Part’ ethos was evident during the pandemic with over 2000 volunteers and countless community groups involved in supporting their neighbours through unprecedented times. The role of digital technology in harnessing this community response was clear with mutual aid groups appearing through social media platforms overnight and a new public engagement platform – *Participate Now* – being launched. A new crowdfunding platform was also piloted to secure funding for community projects. Building on this momentum is a real opportunity for the Borough and presents a chance to engage a broader cross section of residents than was the case through more traditional methods.

We will be successful if we see

- Higher response rates to public engagement and consultation exercises
- An increased public perception that the council is a listening organisation Greater reach and engagement with residents through social media platforms
- New funding sources created through a crowdfunding platform
- Reductions in levels of digital exclusion

A vision for the future



Debbie is passionate about her town and wants to get more involved in making it even better. The council has recently launched a new website to help local people have their say. Debbie has found it easy to use and provided lots of ideas on public transport, waste and local highways. She can see her ideas are being taken seriously and has also joined the digital citizens panel. Her local community group have been supported by the council to use digital tools to help get people in the town involved in volunteering and also to kick off a crowd funding project to help raise money for the village hall. She's also started working with the local library to help out supporting people to use technology.

Making it real

To achieve this, we will deliver the following fundamental changes

1. Engagement & Consultation platform

We will continue to build upon the successes of our digital consultation platform “participate now” (www.participatenow.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) to

	<p>increase public engagement in the policy development process. The platform enables communities to provide ideas at an early stage in an interactive format, a mapping tool, survey tools and allows real time analysis and feedback. The local use of the tool has been highlighted as international best practice by the supplier.</p> <p>The council will extend use of the tool across a wider range of services and continue to learn from how these additional tools can improve meaningful engagement with local people.</p>
2. Crowd Funding – Cheshire West Crowd	<p>We will embed a crowd funding solution - to enable communities to source financial support for projects within their local areas. Greater engagement will take place with community groups to increase uptake of the tool.</p> <p>“Cheshire West Crowd” launched very recently with 10 community projects seeking support 8 of which are now fully supported.</p>
3. Digital Citizen Panel	<p>The council previously had a citizens panel of 2500 residents who acted as a representative sample of local people for surveys and focus groups. A similar approach will be taken to recruit a panel that will be hosted digitally. This will support greater use of tracker surveys and engagement to get ongoing feedback about the council and the borough. This will not replace but be compliment o how we interact with citizens through non digital methods too.</p>
4. Supporting our local voluntary and community sector	<p>We will work through our voluntary and community sector partnership arrangements to ensure community organised are supported to adopt the culture, processes, business models and technologies of the internet era to fulfil their mission.</p>
5. Digital Communications future approach	<p>Traditional communication methods are declining in importance. The communications service will therefore further embrace digital channels. This will be a core capability and skill for all communication professionals enabled through greater training. Our use of social media will evolve to be more interactive, image based and impactful. We will also utilise e mail subscription services. Greater use of digital marketing will be used including audience segmentation and rapid feedback.</p>

11. Care

The challenge and the opportunity

The care, support and independence of vulnerable children, families and adults is a key function of local authorities, working closely with partners such as the NHS and voluntary organisations. During the pandemic digital technology played a vital role - care was delivered remotely; information advice and guidance was critical through the live well platform; care workers collaborated through joint systems; and data was digitised to track the pandemic. There is a huge opportunity to lock in this innovation and take it further.

Digital maturity and data quality is variable across the health and care. Data has too often been held in siloes, meaning that clinicians and care professionals do not have easy access to all of the information that could be useful in caring for their patients and service users.

Evidence suggests there is also more work to do to support people receiving care to see the benefits of using technology to support their wellbeing. A 2019 survey of adult social care noted that 61% of people receiving care don't use the internet at all and have no interest in using it.

The council and its partners has committed to an ambitious transformation programme where care is more integrated, strengths-based, delivered closer to home, and community focused. This presents an unprecedented opportunity to build a digital mindset into the programme from the outset.

We will be successful if we

- Improve the experience for people receiving care
- People feel less socially isolated
- Have more care delivered closer to home
- Avoid duplication in care between services
- Use insight to better target services
- Increased uptake of assistive technology

A vision for the future



Mary provides care to a family member. It's tough going and during covid she has felt quite isolated. Recently though things seem to be getting better. The council and the NHS seem more joined up and Mary doesn't have to tell her story afresh every time. The council has also provided a new telecare service at home which means Mary's family feel more supported 24/7 alongside seeing their care worker. Mary and her family also feel supported to link up to this care support through a smart speaker. The council has also helped with digital training for Mary to access support from the carers service online, helping her connect with carers in a similar position.

Making it real

To achieve this, we will deliver the following fundamental changes

1. Assistive Technology Pilot

We will work with our service users to explore how the latest advances in technology can best support them to live independently and to have more fulfilled lives. Exploring leading practice, we will see the adoption of home sensors, voice and video interactions and data supported care planning.

This programme will be informed through a pilot, where we explore how new assistive technology across health and social care can make a positive impact to how we work together and support service users. This will help drive a new approach to commissioning and care practice.

2. Shared Care Record**

We will work with our health partners to improve the Cheshire Care Record and to build upon its success. We will optimise its use, further embedding it into practice. Working across both the Cheshire and wider Cheshire and Merseyside geography we will engage with the development of a future shared care record joining more data safely across all health and social care settings, both to

	improve direct care for individual patients and service users, and to underpin population health and effective system management.
3. Integrated informatics **	Joined up data and intelligence to ensure the right type of care is put in place at the right time is essential. We will work with our health partners to improve our joint approach to informatics and integrate our ways of working to break down any barriers to sharing information ultimately to deliver better outcomes for the people we support. This will build upon the success of the approach taken during the COVID pandemic, where the Council worked closely with partners across the Cheshire and Merseyside footprint to combine intelligence to inform and manage local approaches including test, track and trace, control measures and smart releases from lockdown.
4. Social Care ways of working **	<p>We will work with our frontline social care teams to seamlessly integrate technology into the working practices of care. We will make sure the equipment doesn't build a barrier to having the right conversation, ensuring that systems and processes are simple and straight forward. We will ensure our social care workforce is confident in how to make best use of the tools they have, enabling them to reduce unnecessary administration, allowing more time to focus on our service users.</p> <p>To facilitate even easier integrated and partnership working we will put in place simple and practical ways in which we can collaborate with our partners. We will ensure our partners can work from Council core locations without the need for complicated processes to get online and utilise collaboration features within Office 365 to enhance how we work together.</p>
5. Online assessment and marketplace	<p>Residents will be able to communicate with our services online through redesigned digital processes. They will be able to submit and access information in relation to their care or someone they care for, aligned to data protection and online safety measures.</p> <p>We will explore further opportunities to enhance our community platform offer Live Well provides such as a more deeply integrated Artificial Intelligent chat bot and introducing transactional capabilities e.g. purchasing of services online in a safe, secure way, ensuring access to quality services.</p>
6. Tackling social isolation **	We will work with our partners and commissioned services to understand the scale and impact of social isolation within the borough, establishing links with our inclusion partnership and volunteering networks as well as understanding how digital tools can be utilised to help reduce social isolation.
8. Support to carers **	We will introduce a better experience for our carers ensuring access to information and services is easy and ensuring that digital support is available, access to digital skills supported is available to them. One recent element of this approach has been the purchase of 300 tablet devices for carers.
9. Future commissioning intentions	We commission care services across our Health and Wellbeing directorate to the value of £148m per annum. We will ensure that digital offers and capability is included in all future commissions, ensuring that we can help shape the market and encourage digital innovation.

10. Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) Digital	We will continue to work in partnership and help to develop a joined up digital strategy across the Council and the Health at a local and sub regional scale to ensure we have a whole system approach to people and place and continue to enhance our ways of working and relationships with health.
11. National Strategy and Engagement	We will engage with National and Local strategy, adopting good practice from NHSX, NHS Digital and the Department for Health and Social Care. We will actively engage with the Local Government Association within their Care Technology Support Programme to adopt good practice and play an active role in their community of practice.
12. Digital Transport **	We will explore how digital and data solutions can support a better experience for children and vulnerable adults using transport services and make improvements to the existing digital experience.

*** denotes that this scheme is not fully funded and will be subject to securing external funding through government, partner agencies or through prioritisation on existing budgets.*

12. Capability

The challenge and the opportunity

To achieve the outcomes in this plan, it is vital that the organisation has the right systems, capabilities, and approach to make it happen. A transformation programme has taken place to modernise the infrastructure and to improve capabilities within the council. The challenge and opportunity is to realise the benefits from this programme and to take it to the next stage.

Equally there is a huge opportunity to make the organisation more productive through the use of digital through greater mobile working, automation of internal processes and developing the digital skills of the workforce. In a consultation on the proposed 2021-22 budget, residents suggested that this was something they would like to see more of across the council. Internally, a corporate services review took place which highlighted digital transformation as key enabler for better internal service and greater self-service.

If we are successful will we will see

- Every employee reach have a foundation level of digital skills
- Further rationalisation of key business systems
- Improved ICT delivery performance both for ongoing service and project delivery
- Rationalisation of council buildings as a result of mobile working
- Easier service, councillor and public access to data and insight

A vision for the future



Ben and Paul have worked for the council for last 10 years. It been a great organisation to work for and recently they have started working from home following the pandemic. It's been a strange experience at first, but one positive is the council has really raised its game with technology. A digital skills academy has started, and they have been able to learn all about new tools that make their life slightly easier. It's easier to get data as well about their service in an accessible way and focused online meetings have proved invaluable for projects. A new intranet has been developed which is much more interactive and help Ben and Paul find the information they need to get things done. Staff webinars are now commonplace and a great way for the council to let staff know what's happening and for colleagues to raise issues. They feel even more positive about the organisation and feel so much more confident in this new environment.

Making it real

To achieve this, we will deliver the following fundamental changes

1. Digital Leadership

Clear leadership is essential to the council embracing digital in everything we do. We will work with leaders across the Council to recognise how digital forms an important part of their service delivery and put in place a "Digital Charter" that is signed up to, visible and bought into.

2. Strategic Capabilities

Instead of a traditional silo approach of every service has its own system we will invest in cross-cutting capabilities that can meet the needs of many services, providing the council with simplified processes, better value for money and a consistent and simple digital experience for our residents.

We will work with a smaller number of suppliers will be challenged to offer functionality rich digital systems with a focus on the customer experience, data quality, integration, open standards and adaptability.

3. Modern Workforce

With a significant proportion of the Council staff and Members working in a mobile way, we will introduce more tools that help us be more productive and strike the right balance of wellbeing and work.

We will put in place better collaboration tools to seamlessly work together and with partners and making best use of advances in biometrics and networking to make accessing the Councils network and essential systems simple but ultimately safe and secure.

4. Data as an asset

The Council holds a vast amount of data across many different services. We will use our data to better inform key decisions, improve operations and target resources. Through a data engineering discipline, we will combine key data sets to drive actionable decisions. There will be greater adoption of Power BI dashboards and further data sets will be published in line with the open data agenda.

5. Digital Academy	<p>Our workforce is our most important resource, we will invest in key training to enable more productive ways of working. Taking learning from how we responded so quickly to the pandemic, we will build on our agile approach that led to rapid deployment of essential ICT equipment and new digital processes releases in a matter of days.</p> <p>We will build digital confidence, increasing awareness of cybersecurity, enhancing data literacy and embedding a more digital culture, freeing up our workforce to focus on the job at hand. Our approach is to have learning pathways, embedded into our Learning Management System giving all staff access to core digital skills.</p> <p>In addition to the Core skills, more advanced pathways for Advanced and Specialist skills will increase the digital capability in the organisation to champion and continually improve our processes and ways of working. We will build on our existing organisation wide technology champion network, giving opportunities to learn new digital skills to support their teams.</p>
6. Future IT / digital operating model	<p>The Councils digital ambition cuts across the entire organisation and as such we need to ensure that our current ICT and Digital models are aligned to this strategy. We will review how we work with our ICT Shared Service and with our digital delivery partner Qwest Services to ensure that we can deliver at pace and with quality.</p>
7. Digital Infrastructure	<p>In line with many public sector services, we continue to move much of our estate to cloud services and follow a hybrid cloud approach. This balances existing investments in our Council-owned data centre with the resilience, flexibility and security of the Cloud.</p> <p>We will put in place a clear programme of essential replacement to ensure our infrastructure remains to be a strong and safe foundation from which we can work more flexibly from.</p> <p>Connectivity will be key to our evolution as a Council post-Covid. Our office spaces will be redesigned and staff will continue to work remotely or in a hybrid way supported by improved and unified communications platforms. Staying connected will be essential and will also support our wider engagement out into our communities.</p>
8. Productivity	<p>We will help and empower all of the councils workforce by introducing a redesigned intranet that not only provides better information, advice and guidance wherever we are working but is integrated into one seamless and connected knowledge management platform with personalisation throughout.</p> <p>We will deploy the latest tools such across our Power Platform to develop internal automated processes. This will enhance our productivity on routine internal transactions with low development costs and fast deployment times. Through the digital academy we will develop leads within services to build simple solution to improve their service themselves.</p>

9. Security	<p>Security is fundamental to how we work will build this thinking into our technology design from the outset. Our investment across ICT will ensure security and compliance and we will continue to make sure the Council is protected from external cyber threat by putting the right requirements and standards in place with external providers and our own data centre and IT service.</p> <p>Council staff will be supported with a series of learning modules to increase awareness of cyber risk and random cyber attacks</p>
10. Green agenda	<p>We will work with our supply chain and key partners on how we can reduce our carbon footprint in line with our commitment to tackling the climate emergency.</p> <p>We will keep the climate change priority at the heart of our decisions around our data centre and core infrastructure, building on the carbon reductions through our recent refurbishment of the datacentre which reduced carbon emissions by 172 tonnes per annum.</p>
11. Council Companies	<p>We will work with our family of companies to align digital plans, sharing learning to support the best possible customer experience and to take opportunities to share digital capabilities.</p>

13. Methodology & Governance

Methodology

The approaches taken by each theme may vary slightly but at their core the Prince 2 Agile methodology will be used across this strategic programme, as opposed to a traditional waterfall approach. The benefits of this approach are:

- Earlier benefits to the customer through incremental delivery therefore earlier return on investment
- Increased stakeholder confidence through customer engagement and feedback
- Helps deliver on time and hit deadlines
- Plan a stage at a time rather than detailed work up front

Our approach will follow the Government Digital Services (GDS) well developed standards and will always **Start with the users needs!**



- **Assessment** – Understand the problem and the current experience
- **Benefits** – Define the benefits to our customers, service users and workforce through digital
- **Co-Design** – Design the change together through user experience design, prototyping

- **Deliver** – Using clear agile approaches to prioritisation, delivery of alpha and beta iterations
- **Monitor** – Keep a view on Customer Experience and the programme benefits

Governance

Each theme will have in place project governance to oversee the delivery of the various initiatives from across the Council (where required) and regular progress will be reported into Management Board to ensure there is oversight of the whole programme.

The leads for each of the initiatives will through existing member governance and engagement with portfolio holders ensure members are fully informed of progress and emerging opportunities.

Awareness and Progress

The programme is intending to have its own micro-website, which will not only show case the aims of the Cheshire West and Chester digital programme but outline progress against our plan in a simple and visual way, so that residents can keep up to date, engage with us, share their ideas and follow the Councils progress on this important journey.

14. Measures of Success

To help monitor progress and the benefits of the digital themes within this strategy a set of success measures have been defined below. It is expected that through the programmes maturity that these may evolve as new initiatives, approaches and technologies emerge.

In a number of cases the Council is breaking new ground or putting in place new ways of working for and as such some of the measures will be determined as the projects move forward and evolve:

Digital Theme	Measure of Success	20/21 Baseline	24/25 Target	Additional information
Communities	% of residents 16 and over that use the internet infrequently (over 3 months) or have never used it.	8.2%	7.5%	National average is currently 7.8%
Connectivity	% of premises with access to ultrafast broadband 100mb and above	51%	95%	Key dependency with connectivity partners and upgrades of infrastructure.
Connectivity	% of premises with access to gigabit capable broadband (>1000Mbps)	26%	85%	In line with national targets.
Commerce	Size of local digital economy in GVA	TBD	TBD	Planned to be published as part of the state of the Borough report and is linked to GVA for information & communication services.
Co-Production	Number of visitors taking part in digital engagements	4,542	5,000	Active residents shaping decisions through participate now. Target to

				be revised (Q3 following further use of solution)
Co-Production	Number of projects successfully funded through crowdfunding	TBD	TBD	Cheshire West Crowdfund just about to launch and will inform baseline and targets in year.
Care	Number of individuals enabled to live more independently through the use of technology enabled care.	-	TBD	Assistive technology pilot under way supporting 30 to 60 individuals / Families –Target to be informed - Q4
Care	Percentage of assessments completed via an online self-assessment	-	TBD	Online self-assessment capability being introduced July 21. Target to informed - Q4
Customer	% of Customers Satisfied or above with their digital experience	74.8%	80%	75% is inline with good practice across Local Government
Customer	% of Customers using digital services to transact with the Council	55%	70%	Existing Council PMF Target
Capability	% of the workforce completing digital academy foundations	-	90%	Digital academy is a newly launched skills pathway across the Council